



PORTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 98, Portland, CT 06480

November 2023 Newsletter

Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History
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December 2nd & 3rd

This year marks the 12th year of our Festival of Wreaths. Over the first eleven years over 400 wreaths and holiday decorations have been donated for this teacup-style raffle. We have benefited from the generosity of our members, town businesses and others who love to decorate wreaths. The Festival is our second largest fundraiser, only surpassed by our town-wide tag sale day.

On Saturday, December 2 and Sunday, December 3 the creativity of our community will shine as we display the donated holiday decorations during our teacup-style raffle. Tickets will be \$1 each or a sheet of 24 for \$20. Tickets are placed in the bags corresponding to the wreath(s) you would like to take home.

The Festival will be open noon to 4pm and is located at the Carriage House behind 329 Main Street. The Portland High School A Cappella group will perform at 3pm on Sunday afternoon.

Put on your warmest sweater and drop in for some warm cider, homemade cookies and mingle with some new friends!

Mark Your Calendars!

12TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF WREATHS

Saturday, Dec 2 & Sunday, Dec 3

Noon to 4pm

Carriage House behind 329 Main Street



Products for your Holiday Shopping from the Callander Cupboard

Items below will be available at the Jingle Mingle Festival of Wreaths

All items will be available at our Festival of Wreaths on December 2 and 3. They are also available at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History, 492 Main Street. Order online by going to our website PortlandHistSoc.org and clicking on Callander Cupboard.



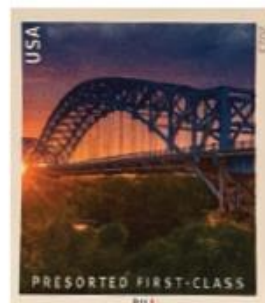
**John Wells Stancliff
1813-1891
Portland, CT**

8 Note cards with envelopes per pack, 2 of each of 4 beautiful oil paintings reproduced. **\$10**



**Portland, Conn
Town Seal Wooden
Cutting Board**

This cutting board measures approximately 13.5"x 9.5"x .56" and is laser engraved on one side (decorative) with the Town Seal and a blank back side for food prep. It is tough, thick, sturdy and is made from 100% environmentally friendly bamboo which is 16% stronger than maple! **\$25**



**8x10 Matted Photo of
Arrigoni Bridge by
Joe Gowac**

This is an 8x10 matted photo of the original Arrigoni Bridge photo taken by East Hampton resident Joe Gowac and used on the Bridges stamps in August 2023. Joe has kindly arranged for these photos to be available for holiday gift giving. **\$25**



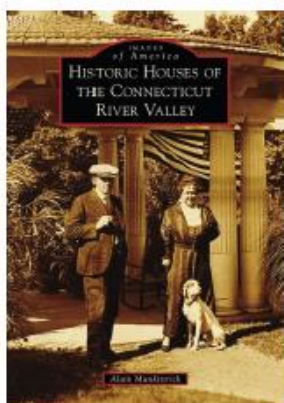
**Bells from
East Hampton's
Bevin Bells**

White Bell Ornament with a choice of 3 wintry images — holly, snowman or cardinal — imprinted with Portland CT on the back. Size: 1-5/8" **\$6.50**



**Believe
Sleigh Bell
Ornament**

Celebrate the holiday season with a silver sleigh bell with Believe stamped into it and strung with red Believe ribbon. **\$4**



**Historic Houses
of the Connecticut
River Valley
by Alain Munkittrick**

Portland resident Alain Munkittrick's newest publication, Historic Houses of the Connecticut River Valley, is now available to purchase in our online Callander Cupboard at www.PortlandHistSoc.org. **\$24**

JINGLE & MINGLE

2023 Festival of Wreaths

**Saturday, December 2
&
Sunday, December 3**

Noon to 4PM

**Carriage House behind
329 Main Street**





Exceptional and Rare Octagon Houses

by Amy Knous

Of the many people who pass by Marlborough Street in Portland, one wonders how many realize what an exceptional gem we have in the two octagon houses. The Joseph Williams House and the Gilbert Stancliff House (recently painted blue) were built in 1855 and 1853 respectively. They are unique in that they are the only known pair of such houses in Connecticut.

The homes were built for Gilbert Stancliff and his brother-in-law Joseph Williams and wife Laura. The homes were built of brownstone with a stucco covered exterior. Stancliff owned the quarry that supplied the brownstone. Williams owned the Williams & Clarke grocery store formerly on Main Street. Gilbert was a descendent of James Stancliff, Portland's first settler. Both were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

The octagon is an eight sided house style popularized by Orson Squire Fowler through his book, "The Octagon House, A Home for All" published in 1848. Fowler, who was a New York Phrenologist (the study of how the shape of one's head relates to their character), believed that octagon houses were cheaper to build, easier to heat and cooler in the summer. He also believed that having a functional, comfortable home was a top priority and that one should make whatever sacrifices necessary to do so. Each of the homes in Portland has an octagonal cupola at the center of the roof and a single story porch at the front facade. The Stancliff house's porch is a 20th century replacement. According to a 1950 article in Connecticut Circle magazine, the Stancliff house had a hallway at the center of the octagon with the kitchen, dining room, pantry, living room, bedrooms and music room along the exterior walls. The article also states that all the rooms are connected so that one could walk around the house without using the central hall.

Over the years the homes have had several uses; a convent for the Church of St. Mary, medical offices and most recently as apartments. Former Portland Historical Society president George Gilbert remembers going there as an altar boy. The nuns would ask him to move items for them and he recalls seeing an altar set up in their residence, with the sisters' rooms arranged along the octagon's sides. Gilbert said, "It's a very interesting design for a house. They are jewels- both of them".

One can only imagine the elegance of these homes in their day.



On the occasion of their daughter's baptism in 1963, the parents of Ann Burgess, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Supryniewicz are shown talking with several Sister of Mercy nuns on the steps of St. Mary's Convent. Photo courtesy of Ann Burgess.

**Note from the President
Julie Macksoud**

As 2023 winds down I hope you will take a moment to reflect on what the Portland Historical Society means to you and renew your membership. As an all-volunteer board with several hundred members, we truly rely on your participation and support to bring you wonderful events like the Festival of Wreaths coming right up the first weekend in December. We have been delighted to offer special events during this, our 50th anniversary year as an organization. We cannot do it without you! This is my final term as president. Please know what an honor and a privilege it has been to be part of an amazing group of dedicated volunteers who work so hard to keep our mission alive and benefit the beautiful town of Portland. Here's to our historic past, our engaging present, and our promising future!

Middlesex County Museum Meet-up

On September 25, 2023, the Essex Historical Society hosted a meet-up of local history and museum professionals to discuss their programs and funding resources for the next few years leading up to the semiquincentennial.

Eleven out of the 15 towns from the Middlesex County, as well as other historic sites, the State Museum Association and the Ct. League of History Organizations, crammed into the cozy Pratt kitchen (see photo below).

The following people from Portland were in attendance: Deborah Ellsworth, Martha Lutecki, Debra Freitag and Julie Macksoud.



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**Have you joined or renewed your membership?
 Check the date on the mailing label**

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